

(72)

887 long recitation of precepts and lauds, mostly in Pali and not intelligible
 788 to the casual ear. The second part, the *hsu-taung*, is the asking for
 593 blessings in a formula which asks: "May (my mother) be blessed.
 179. May (a married couple) have long life together." My father worked
 88 through a list of all his and my mother's relations and connections.
 Going down in order of seniority he fitted them all into a rhythm and we
 came to know the place of each in this melodious chant. When we were
 young we sometimes waited with bated breath for the turn of a relation
 who had just quarrelled with my parents, but my father never omitted to
 ask for blessings on him. We loved this part of our parents' prayers.
 Uncles, first and second cousins whom we did not see for long stretches



of time, were kept familiar in this way. Relationships were prefixed to each name; births, deaths and marriages were registered, the infant cousins added, the newly-dead aunts omitted, and the new niece-at-law joined in a long and happy life to her husband. We loved especially our own place in the litany—my sisters, because they were given their full and correct names by which they were never called, and I, because I was an exception, called even in this formal litany by the affectionate name my parents had for me. "*Tha Maung Sett Kaing*," my father, would chant, "*Tha Maung Sett Kaing, Tha-mi Mamie, Tha-mi Ma Mya Thin, Tha-mi Ma Hin Aye, Tha-mi Ma Myat Kyi*: Son Succeeding and Lasting, Daughter Mamie, Daughter Fragrant Emerald, Daughter Cool as the Dew, Daughter Noble and Clear."

Most of the pensioners lived a similar life to my father's at this time. It was indicative of the contentment of their retired existence that they

(73)

never talked about the business of their past working days when they met. Sometimes they showed a fleeting interest in news of the postings of friends still in service, but even the official matters of Thaton district itself did not enter into their discussions. They talked of charity donations, of the respective monasteries which they endowed and attended, and of formulæ of *eggaya-hto*, alchemy, or the search for the philosopher's stone which will turn all metals to gold. Most Burmans get interested in *eggaya-hto* during their later years, even if few now practise it.

This alchemy, which has no place among the true teachings of Buddhism, has to be done under auspicious astrological influences and is usually carried on in secret. Burman Buddhists condemn the use of it when it is carried on for *lawba*, greed for riches, but others justify the process as a means of concentrating the mental faculties. The common stories tell of hermits in the forests, who by their ascetic life and concentrated meditation have more powers over the forces of nature, as being well versed in the processes of alchemy. When such a hermit achieves the extreme concentration of mind on his task he is successful—the philosopher's stone is discovered, the body of the hermit then disappears in the dissolving of matter, and his spirit is free to live unhampered by the body, till the arrival of the next Buddha on the earth. Most Burmese women, however, although they believe that this happens in the case of hermits, object very strongly to the practice of alchemy on the part of their menfolk, owing to the money and energy that is wasted on seeking out new and expensive formulæ once the craze has got hold of a man. All experiments are started with mercury which is melted with other minerals, animal or vegetable substances which derive their magical properties partly from their inaccessibility, partly from being treated with prescribed rites. My father had no intention of taking up alchemy and impoverishing us, but he too was very interested to hear of the success and failure of various methods. These discussions must have been kept well anchored to reality by the other chief topic of discussion—the families of the pensioners.

The five duties of a parent towards his children include the settling of the child in a good marriage. By the time the *a-so-ya* mins retire, their sons and daughters have reached a marriageable age. The sons are in the process of winning a good position in one of the government services and their daughters have been dressed with an adequate amount of jewellery. The marriage market, which had no existence in former Burmese society and which still is unheard of in Ye, and among the poorer people, is now a very concrete institution among the educated and modern classes. The rise of the *minkadaw* class and of higher paid Class I government officials has been mainly responsible for this. More

887
521

[822]

822
792
779593
584
554
177.
58
565

are recorded with enthusiasm and delighted precision of detail; and when an hour or so has been passed in this way, a little more rice-husking is done, and the girls set to work getting ready the onions and sesamum seed, and slicing up the cocoa-nut kernels. This sort of thing goes on all the night through. There is half an hour's work, and then an hour of singing and story-telling and gossip; about the great Shinbinthalyaung, the gigantic recumbent image of Shin Gautama dug up lately near Pegu; of the two min-laungs, the embryo kings, who have been revealed there, and the third one, who is foretold by the old theit-sa, the prophecy which declares that he will restore the ancient Talaing kings and revive religion; of the new hti which is being set up on the pagoda of the lotus tank, and its exceeding splendour, each single one of the concentric rings having been assigned as a particular favour to one out of many competing districts. Then there is a discussion as to the new fashion of turbans, the one plain colour with worked flowers on it, which has supplemented the old thinner style with more braid-like patterns; and the present rage for waist-cloths with many-coloured stripes in place of the old wavy and dog's-tooth fashion. Then the girls are rallied about the method in which they dress their hair—all of them in the style just declared treasonable in the upper country. Queen Supayalat has hit upon some particular set, or plaiting of her tresses, which she thinks becomes her very well, and a royal order has come out making it penal for any meaner damsels to adopt the same method. Consequently all the maidens from Taungoo to Kyauk-Hpyu and the A-eng Pass to Malawun have made up after the queenly model and flatter themselves that it is *chic*. There are always ghost stories at these gatherings, tales about the three farmer brothers that were killed just after harvest time three years ago, and now haunt the dense patch of swampy jungle down by the creek as nat seins, and sometimes scare the fishermen out of a night's work by the violent agitation of the tree-tops on a still night; and then there is that old hag in the lone house at the far end of the village, who is certainly a witch; it must have been she who gave the old sikkè the tet, poor old man, and he a payā-tagā too, founder

533

832

527

521 ●

[291]

[775]

[754]

527 of the pagoda on the slope of the "Brother and Sister Hill";
● 521 and there is little Ma Mi; the old beldam looked at her over
[754] the fence on the fifth of last waning, and the poor thing lost
her sweetheart before the change of the moon, and had all
her fine false hair stolen only three days ago: proof enough
that of the *jettatura*.

527 It is long past midnight, when all the cocks of the
village crow together, deriving their knowledge of the exact
time from the diet of burnt astrological books, pecked at by
their ancestors long ago, when the objection to cabalistic
works was much more violent than it is nowadays; and
sometimes daylight is coming in, and the sound of the
morning chant steals over from the monastery, when the
party breaks up and all go home. The *kauk hnyin* has
been all husked, and, mixed up with the other ingredients,
is simmering away over the fire. Every one has a virtuous
consciousness of having gained considerable *kutho* in
addition to having spent a very agreeable time. Few go
to sleep. They have eaten too much *le'hpet* for that, and
in an hour or two some of them will be wanted again to
take the *tamanè* round. That is done about eight o'clock
in the case of the monks. The farmer himself and his
family carry it to the monastery in the spire-shaped lacquer-
box, and having paid the usual reverence, deposit it before
the superior, who looks on calmly without a word of thanks,
or even the semblance of a recognition, but says before they
go, that if they keep the Ten Precepts and live virtuously,
they will escape the Four States of Punishment and be
delivered from the Five Enemies. Then the "supporters"
wheel on the right, and depart home to make up the portions
for all their friends and neighbours. These are usually taken
round by the girls, who go in beavies of three or four, dressed
in their finest clothes and with flowers in their hair, and
deliver the dainty with compliments, and injunctions to eat
it immediately. By six o'clock in the evening, when the
sonorous wooden bell of the monastery is summoning in all
the scholars, the entire village is asleep; and they do not get
up very early next morning. Nobody in the whole place has
been drunk; and if there is an opium-eater in the village, he
was not asked to the feast and had none of the *tamanè*.

xiv

WOMEN

175

a boy who cannot. If there were more nunneries, there would be more education among the women; here is cause and effect. But there are not, so the little girls work instead. While their brothers are in the monasteries, the girls are learning to weave and herd cattle, drawing water, and collecting firewood. They begin very young at this work, but it is very light; they are never overworked, and so it does them no harm usually, but good.

512
212
871
562
868

The daughters of better-class people, such as merchants, and clerks, and advocates, do not, of course, work at field labour. They usually learn to read and write at home, and they weave, and many will draw water. For to draw water is to go to the well, and the well is the great meeting-place of the village. As they fill their jars they lean over the curb and talk, and it is here that is told the latest news, the latest flirtation, the little scandal of the place. Very few men or boys come for water; carrying is not their duty, and there is a proper place for flirtation. So the girls have the well almost to themselves.

562
565
871
[521]●

Almost every girl can weave. In many houses there are looms where the girls weave their dresses and those of their parents; and many girls have stalls in the bazaar. Of this I will speak later. Other duties are the husking of rice and the making of cheroots. Of course, in richer households there will be servants to do all this; but even in them the daughter will frequently weave either for herself or her parents. Almost every girl will do something, if only to pass the time.

562
286
463

They have no accomplishments. They do not

XVIII

MANNERS

225

This tolerance, this inclination to let each man
go his own way, is conspicuous even down to the
little events of life. It is very marked, even in con-
versation, how little criticism is indulged in towards
each other, how there is an absolute absence of desire
to proselytize each other in any way. 'It is his
way,' they will say, with a laugh, of any peculiar
act of any person; 'it is his way. What does it
matter to us?' Of all the lovable qualities of
the Burmese, and they are many, there are none
greater than these—their light-heartedness and their
tolerance.

571
[521]

A Burman will always assume that you know
your own business, and will leave you alone to do
it. How great a boon this is I think we hardly can
understand, for we have none of it. And he carries
it to an extent that sometimes surprises us.

Suppose you are walking along a road and there
is a broken bridge on the way, a bridge that you
might fall through. No one will try and prevent
you going. Any Burman who saw you go will, if
he think at all about it, give you the credit for
knowing what you are about. It will not enter into
his head to go out of his way to give you advice
about that bridge. If you ask him he will help you
all he can, but he will not volunteer; and so if you
depend on volunteered advice, you may fall through
the bridge and break your neck, perhaps.

At first this sort of thing seems to us to spring
from laziness or from discourtesy. It is just the
reverse of this latter; it is excess of courtesy that
assumes you to be aware of what you are about, and
capable of judging properly.

You may get yourself into all sorts of trouble,

292 THE SOUL OF A PEOPLE CH.

775 at the officer's disposal, and he and his men settled down for the night.

792 After dinner a fire was built on the ground, and
521 the officer went and sat by it and talked to the headman of the village and the monk. First they talked of the dacoits and of crops, unfailing subjects of interest, and gradually they drifted from one subject to another till the Englishman remarked about the monastery, that it was a very large and fine one for such a small secluded village to have built. The monastery was of the best and straightest teak, and must, he thought, have taken a very long time and a great deal of labour to build, for the teak must have been brought from very far away; and in explanation he was told a curious story.

792 It appeared that in the old days there used to be only a bamboo and grass monastery there, such a monastery as most jungle villages have; and the then monk was distressed at the smallness of his abode and the little accommodation there was for his school—a monastery is always a school. So one rainy reason he planted with great care a number of teak seedlings round about, and he watered them and cared for them. 'When they are grown up,' he would say, 'these teak-trees shall provide timber for a new and proper building; and I will myself return in another life, and with those trees will I build a monastery more worthy than this.' Teak-trees take a hundred years to reach a mature size, and while the trees were still but saplings the monk died, and another monk taught in his stead. And so it went on, and the years went by, and from time to time new monasteries of bamboo were built and

BOAT RACES: There are different kinds of boat races - e.g. in some one single rower is pitted against another. In others the boats carry three rowers each and in yet others six to eight rowers on each side. If the crafts differ in weight the lighter one is made heavier to equalise the two. The race is held between two contestants only. These race meetings are held towards the rains during the months of MARCH, MARCHING, TINTHELIN and THADINGYOT. In the hot season the water in the river subsides and makes it not very suitable for boat racing. During these four months, boat races are held once every three or four days and sometimes for several days in succession. The people who participate as contestants have an added interest in the outcome of the match as they also bet coconuts or money against their opponent. This is a direct transaction and not carried out through a bookmaker. It is more in the nature of a personal wager between the two. In the case of the races where there are six to seven rowers in each boat, the stakes reach three or four hundred rupees.

526

[525]

U Myaing rowed in one of these boat races when he was a young man. On that occasion he was awarded a draw. The boat that wins two successive runs wins the match. If not they are made to compete up to a total of four runs. If each of the boats alternately reach the winning post first for a total of four, then the match is declared a draw. At each of these boat races, about a thousand people attend and watch the proceedings from three o'clock to five or six in the evening. When the wager between the contestants takes the form of coconuts, cheroots, etc., the winner invites the loser and others to come and share his winnings after he has cocked the coconuts into coconut-rice, etc.

[525]

Sports are held in some years towards the beginning of the cold season sometimes when there are big charities being held. There are individual races between paired men and between paired ponies. There are about 900 to a thousand spectators, and these races are held on the same principles as that of the boat races with the same rules for selection of winners and placing of bets.

These races sometimes take the form of a contest between two villages. These are big affairs with two to three thousand rupees

[521] ●

- 136 -

being involved in bets. For this purpose special rowers are trained and fed by one or another of the big betters. These men are so strong and skilful that they can drive a boat carrying fifty to sixty baskets of paddy clear over a raft of a hundred bamboos tied together. A stop watch is used to time performances and a match may be arranged with another village. A rower by the name of NGA THIT once won over three thousand rupees for their village. U Myaing's share was three or four rupees. Some people in the village do not bet at all, others bet about forty to fifty rupees.

526
[525]

THE GREASED POLE: The greased pole is an amusement set up during the month of TAZAUNGMON for the KARTHEIN festival and the month of KASON for the NYAUNG-YE-THUN-ONE festival. On these occasions, besides other festivities a huge thick bamboo pole is made smooth at the joints and set upright. Then a bowl of greasy liquid such as THAYAW water (shampoo) or lard is perched towards the top of the pole in such a manner as to send the greasy liquid coursing down the pole with every slight shake it is given. On the top of the pole are placed several prizes such as items of clothing. After this people are free to get the prizes if they can. They get on one another's shoulders to reach the top. Sometimes they are successful and sometimes all of them come tumbling down. U Myaing tried this when he was young. At one KASON festival U Myaing and three others tried to reach the top by co-operating with each other but they were unsuccessful. Others try all sorts of ways such as daubing the body with mud etc.

In the village there are few entertainments, so that even if two bullocks start to fight in the fields, someone yells out the news and everyone comes out to watch. However, special matches are not arranged in their locality.

[517]

There was not much of social visiting back in Pathe. Most of the visits were on business and the host proffered things such as prepared dried fish and other trifles. The talk centers around NGAPI and NGA-CHAU. There are no visits made just because he is feeling dull and bored, although there are some people in the village who do so.

574
5210

The whole family goes to the ANTHEIN or marionette shows

STATUS OF WOMEN

73



187. DOMESTIC FLOWER STAND
(NYAUNG-YE-G, PP. 6, 63).

zone of commerce is neutral; women embark in wholesale trade, besides transacting the bulk of the retail trade. In certain localities women do the lighter part of the out-door work, and in the poorer districts of the dry zone they share in the heavy labour. Women are accorded precedence among men according to the standing they have acquired by marriage or by their independent efforts. The *Kyaungam*—the woman who has founded and who supports a school—enjoys a deference on all sides proportioned to the munificence of her gift. Women mix freely among men but are never jostled by them. At great gatherings men and women group apart. The Burman women are smart at repartee, and hold their own in the perpetual banter that goes on between the sexes.

J

one, no disability of a practical kind exists for her. But it is the aspiration of every woman to transmigrate as a man in the next phase of existence (*hawa*, p. 43). As the state of a man is thought a more desirable one, so it is inferred that her life in the previous incarnation has brought the woman's state upon her. How deep and tender is the poetry which the idea of transmigration weaves into the life of the Buddhist may be judged from the example at the close of Chapter XXIII. of *The Soul of a People*. Orphans are adopted by relatives, and in default of such, never fail to find foster-parents. The division of labour between the sexes is the common one of out-door and in-door. Wherever circumstances permit, women are relieved of hardship; the sheltered places in boats and carts belong to the women and children. The great middle



188. WAYSIDE WATER STAND IN THE CITY
(UP. 31, 63).

562
[175][531
353]

[736]

[462]

[875]

[271]

[521]

MANNERS AND CUSTOMS

77



THE VILLAGE CHEVAL-DE-FRISE.

away from the company. In a similar spirit of courtesy a rider dismounts and umbrellas are closed. Among acts of discourtesy few are accounted so grave by the Burmans as that of awakening a sleeper. The reluctance to disturb a sleeper is connected with the belief that the spirit (*laipya*) leaves the body during sleep (p. 197). It is looked upon as a weakness to show resentment and temper (*daetha*, p. 44). A visitor in a house is offered a new mat to sit upon, water to drink, betel to chew, and a spittoon. If it be meal-time he is invited to partake; other-

wise he is asked if he has had food, and refreshment is brought. Although the quota of leisure that falls to everyone is greater in Burma than anywhere else, owing to the wide-spread prosperity of the inhabitants, there is perhaps no country in which every man, woman, and child is less exempt from business concern. Thus it happens that after a few commonplaces, conversation inevitably gravitates to business—prices, harvests, prospects. Next in interest come the festival programmes, the local celebrities and their doings. In every house there are scales and weights, and the household is engaged in occasional or regular trade. Accounts in money and kind are current between neighbours. Whatever spare produce remains is exposed for sale.

The villages either have a quick fence of impenetrable thorny bamboo (*myinwa*), or a hedge of cactus or briar, or bamboo *chevaux-de-frise*. In some parts they are open. The old towns (*mye*) had ramparts and stockades (Nos. 6, 371, 387). The highest sites about the village are for the *sadi*, the *Payé-mye* or sacred ground, the next best are for the *kyauung*. Then comes the enclosure of



187. APPROACH TO THE VILLAGE.

361
[349]
[311]
[346]

576
[349]
[513
775]
[152]
574
521
437